

Bowls are for Ice Cream, Not Hair Cuts! by inazuma_hunter

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Summary:

When Eleven tells Mike she needs to take a break, the boy takes it pretty hard. He turns to the one person he's always been able to count on - Will. But they both actually end up helping each other and Mike comes to a startling realization.

OR

My take on how Byler can become canon in Season 3.

Bowls are for Ice Cream, Not Hair Cuts!

Author's Note:

So this fic is mostly Mike & Will platonic vs Mike/Will romantic. But there are plenty of hints sprinkled in of what might come of this friendship. And then there's the ending....so yeah. Enjoy!

Mike stormed through the hallway, slamming his bedroom door before flopping down on his bed dramatically. Eleven had shown up that morning as usual, and Mike thought they were about to spend another awesome day hanging out together. Instead, she had told him that they needed to take a break. A break! Like the 353 days he spent calling her every single day on the SuperCom wasn't enough of a break?

Apparently not. *Apparently* they'd been spending too much time with one another, and she needed some space. Which was bullshit. Well sure, they had pretty much been spending at least six days a week with each other, and hardly a day passed where she didn't come over to Mike's house, or Mike didn't go over to hers. But that was normal...right? It was his girlfriend after all.

Mike had managed to keep his composure in front of the girl for the most part...you know, after begging and sulking didn't work. He had simply told her to do what she wanted and watched as she left the house with an apology.

One thing Mike did know was he needed to get this out. He needed to talk to someone - and it wasn't hard to pick out who. He picked up his SuperCom and tuned it to the proper channel. "Will...Will do you read? I need to talk to you, over."

There were a couple of moments of static but then Will picked right up. "Hey Mike, I read. Is everything okay? Over."

"Not really, no. I mean, I'm okay physically, but...I just really need to talk. Can you meet me at the park? Over."

"Sure thing Mike. I'll see you there in 20. Over and Out."

It was a very pleasant summer morning in Hawkins when Mike biked into the local park - which made it odd that it was pretty much deserted. He spotted Will idly swinging on the swing set by himself as he approached, his familiar bowl cut being blown in the wind. That was just like Will, not caring if anyone thought he was too old to be swinging or not. Mike smiled to himself as he was hit with a strong wave of nostalgia at the scene in front of him.

"Hey," he said as he dismounted and walked over, "do you wanna be my friend?"

Will rolled his eyes and gave Mike a lopsided grin as the taller boy sat down on the swing next to him. "The answer will always be 'yes', no matter how many times you ask, you cornball." He paused for a second before continuing. "Still the best thing you've ever done?"

"That answer will be 'yes', no matter how many times *you* ask," Mike parroted back at him.

"Cornball," Will repeated with a smile, his cheeks flushing a bit. "Anyways...you said you needed to talk right? What's up?"

Mike sighed. "Something tells me you already know. Did see El before you left?"

"Yeah, we talked briefly as I was leaving the house," Will admitted. "But she just told me that you probably needed me right now, not much else."

"I see," Mike said, bristling at the fact that Eleven presumed so much. "Well, El broke up with me. Well, said we needed to take a 'break' would be more correct I guess. But it feels like a break up. And it sucks, Will. And you know the worst part? I didn't even do anything wrong. Lots of guys out there cheat on their girlfriends, or are rude to them, or pushy. But me? She said she needed some space. That we were spending *too much* time together. So I guess I'm too nice? It just doesn't seem fair."

Will listened patiently as Mike ranted, nodding his head to show he was following along.

"I'm just...not sure what to do I guess. Every idea I have seems to go against her wish of giving her some space. I'm kind of stuck."

"That's the thing Mike," Will said softly. "I don't think you can do anything. I think you just have to kind of sit back and wait. Just give her some time. You gotta remember, the world is still pretty new to her. Things have been kind of a whirlwind this past year, and she hasn't really gotten to just...take a minute to herself, you know?"

Mike looked at the ground sullenly, silently hating that Will was making so much sense. "So just sit around and hope she comes back?"

"If you want to phrase it that way," Will giggled, causing Mike to look up in surprise. "Sorry, I didn't mean to laugh, it's just...you're really bad at doing nothing. You always have been. Your natural inclination is to fix, and help, and control the situation. Which isn't a bad thing!" he added, seeing Mike's face crumple a little. "It's normally a great trait to possess, and you having it saved my life on more than one occasion, Mike. It just kind of...sucks for this situation I guess."

"Yeah...seems like it."

"Just give her some time, I'm sure she'll come around. Everyone knows what a great guy you are Mike," he said before lowering his voice, even though there was no one else around. "El's told me that too. So this is really a case of, 'it's not you, it's her', no matter how cliché that sounds."

Mike's cheeks reddened a bit at the praise. El thought he was a great guy? And Will said *everyone* thought that? His resolve suddenly hardened. He could handle doing nothing. He could wait. It was just a different sort of challenge, and Mike was never one to back down from a challenge.

"Hey," Mike said suddenly as Will pumped his feet into the air once more, "are those new shoes?"

Will looked down at his white and black Converse and shrugged. "Uh,

kinda? I've had them for a few months now though, so not super new."

Mike's stomach suddenly fell. A few months? There was a time when he and Will would notice anything new about one another within a day. And sure, he hadn't seen a lot of Will lately, but he *had* seen him. The Party still had their D&D campaigns...though it was just every three weeks now. And that was with the whole Party. Mike tried to rack his brain for the last time he had hung out with Will, just the two of them, but he came up empty. It had been so long, he couldn't even remember. The guilt hit him hard, right in the pit of his stomach. He'd been so obsessed with El, he'd neglected his best friend. Shit.

Will had gone back to nonchalantly swinging, obviously not noticing Mike's internal crisis he was having. So he was a bit surprised at Mike's next words. "Will, I'm sorry."

"Uh...for what?" Will wrinkled his nose in confusion as he came to a sudden stop on his swing.

"Well...I just kinda realized I haven't exactly been a good friend to you lately. I can't even remember the last time we hung out together alone. And even now, I only dragged you out here just to talk about El? That's not okay. It's not okay at all. And, well, I'm sorry."

Part of Mike expected Will to laugh it off, tell him it was no big deal, that everything was alright. But instead Will just looked over and studied his face before letting out a long sigh.

"I have actually missed you a lot, you big oaf," he admitted wistfully, giving Mike a sad smile.

The admission made Mike feel even worse. How had he let this happen? Will, his best friend that he fought so hard to save. Twice. That he swore he would never lose again. And yet here he was, losing him again, and it was all his own fault. But now that he realized it, maybe it wasn't too late to fix things.

"Will, are you busy tonight?" he blurted out suddenly.

"Uh, no, I don't have any plans, why?"

"Well, I was thinking maybe you could sleep over. Just the two of us, like old times," Mike said nervously. The mere fact that he was even nervous about this proved that this situation had to be rectified.

A grin broke across Will's face, and god Mike had missed that damn smile. "Sure Mike. That sounds great." The two got off of the swings and started walking towards their discarded bicycles.

"Cool," Mike said, a grin sliding onto his own face. "And maybe tomorrow we can go see Back to the Future at the cinema."

"Oh," Will replied, suddenly coming to a stop. "I thought we were going to go see that as a whole group this weekend."

"Well, yeah, that was the plan, but...with things how they are between El and I, it would be weird if we both went. I don't want to cause any internal Party strife. I understand if you wanna go with the rest of the Party though! That's totally fine, don't worry about it. I'll just -"

"No!" the shorter boy cut in quickly. "I mean...no, you're right. I just hadn't thought about the potential awkwardness. Of course I'll go see it with you," Will assured him. "I'm gonna go home and get some stuff, pack a bag for the night. I'll also let the others know not to wait for us to see the film. I'll be over a little later, sound good?"

"Sounds great," Mike corrected. "And Will," he added, stopping the boy as he was mounting his bike, "I, uh, I just want you to know that this isn't just because El and I are fighting, okay? Even if we end up getting back together, *you're* still my best friend. And I'm always going to make time for you."

Will just smiled and gave a thumbs up before heading off. And, if that smile didn't *quite* reach his eyes, well, Mike didn't blame him. Words were cheap after all - Mike would just have to show him.

The rest of the day went great. Will arrived at the Wheeler house in the early afternoon, and the two of them spent the first couple hours

down in the basement playing Nintendo and eating junk food. However that didn't stop either of them from devouring the delicious meal that Mrs. Wheeler had prepared when dinner time rolled around.

The pair practically staggered up the stairs to Mike's room, too full to do anything other than settle back for some comic book reading before bed. When the whole Party slept over, the basement was where everyone camped out, but when it was just Will, they always slept in Mike's room. They had been reading for about an hour, sitting side by side on Mike's bed, backs against the wall, lazily sharing an X-men comic, when Mike stole a glance over at his friend. Will's face looked relaxed and calm, with just a hint of a smile on it as his eyes roved through the panels.

"Do I have something on my face, Wheeler?" Will asked suddenly without even looking away from the page.

Mike's felt his own face heat up bit. "What? N-no. I was just thinking...how lucky I am to have you as a friend. I mean this morning it felt like my whole world was falling apart. There was no way I thought that 12 hours later I'd be having the best night I've had in months. I guess I just wanted to say thanks...for always being there."

The other boy finally looked up at him, a faint smile playing on his lips. "Man...you really must be tired Mike. You're getting all mushy on me," he teased, poking a finger playfully into Mike's ribs.

The older boy yelped in surprise before narrowing his eyes. "Hey," he complained. "I thought we were having a moment here. This is the thanks I get for opening up and sharing my feelings huh?" Mike asked, the playful tone showing he was only kidding as he jabbed his smaller friend back in the ribs, eliciting a giggle back from Will.

Will playfully slapped his hand away before turning serious. "You know I'll always be here for you Mike. No matter what. Crazy together, right?"

"Yeah," Mike answered, a smile coming to his face from the memory. "Crazy together."

They fell back into a comfortable silence and continued to read for a bit before they decided to get ready for bed. Mike yawned, suddenly aware of just how tired he was. It had been a pretty draining day after all. The two brushed their teeth side by side in the bathroom (with a fair amount of playful jostling in between). They hadn't done that in years really, not since they were scrawny 8 year olds who thought brushing their teeth was more about speed than actually getting them clean.

But something felt different today. It was like all of the sudden it hit Mike just how much he had missed the boy who had been a near permanent fixture at his side for the past nine years. Man, Mike could really be an idiot sometimes. Will had just finished rinsing his mouth when he looked at his own reflection in the mirror with a frown, tugging the ends of his hair frustratingly. He tried to sweep his bangs to the side off of his forehead, but they just fell back into their normal place a few seconds later. Mike was just about to ask what was wrong when Will spoke first.

"Do you think I'm ugly?" he blurted out.

The older boy was caught off guard by the question, surprise showing on his face. Will seemed to be even more shocked that he said it though, his eyes wide and his mouth hanging open.

"Oh my god, that was totally a weird question, I'm sorry. Just forget it."

"Will," Mike said, his eyebrows furrowed with worry, "is someone bullying you? Did someone call you ugly?"

"What? No. No Mike, it's fine. I think I've spent one too many nights as a part of Max and El's sleepovers. You know how girls are, they like to just look at themselves in the mirror and pick things about themselves apart," he chuckled nervously.

"I mean, if someone said something -"

"Mike! It's fine. Seriously. I'm sorry I worried you. You've been through enough today. Can I...can I have the bathroom? I need to change."

Mike wanted to pursue it further, but Will's face was beet red and he clearly wanted to move on, so Mike relented with a nod, and returned to his room. He quickly changed into his own pajamas, flopping down on to his mattress while he waited. A few minutes later Will rejoined him, also ready for bed. Neither boy said anything as Will flipped off the light, crawling into his sleeping bag on the floor next to Mike's bed.

"Well...good night Mike," the younger boy said quietly.

"Goodnight, Will....and thanks again. You know for today."

"No problem. Really."

Quiet overtook the room as the pair settled down. Minutes passed, and Mike was feeling drowsy, but there was something he just couldn't leave alone.

"You're not, you know," he blurted out. He saw Will stir in the faint glow provided by the nightlight he had plugged in (the one that they both knew he plugged in only when Will stayed over, but neither of them mentioned it).

"Excuse me?" he said, confusion painting his face.

"Ugly," Mike clarified. "You're not ugly, Will."

"Mike, seriously, you don't have to -"

"No, I mean it. You're not ugly," Mike cut in earnestly. He paused a beat before adding, "You're, um, handsome."

There was a palpable tension in the room as those words hung in the air. Mike briefly wondered if he had gone too far, but then he heard Will squeak out a timid, "Yeah?"

"Yeah," Mike confirmed, breathing a sigh of relief. "Definitely."

Even in the limited light, Mike could see a small smile spread over his friend's face. "O-okay. Um, thanks Mike."

As he listened to Will drift off to sleep, Mike's brain was still

spinning. It was that damn haircut. Will had come to hate it in the last few years, but never took any steps to change it. He claimed it was because they didn't have enough money to afford a trip to the barber shop. And while that might be partially true, Mike also suspected he didn't want to hurt Joyce's feelings by saying he didn't want her cutting his hair anymore. At some point though...enough had to be enough.

A nebulous plan started forming in Mike's mind as sleep began to overtake him. He knew exactly what to do to fix this - now he just had to get Will to agree.

Everything seemed normal the next morning, with neither boy mentioning the conversation of last night. After having breakfast and getting ready for the day, they spent a few hours down in the basement, with Will helping Mike to craft some of the finer points of their next D&D campaign. At about 11:30 Mike looked at his watch and decided now was the time to put his plan into action.

"Alright, Will, you ready to head out?"

The shorter boy quirked an eyebrow at him. "Mike, the movie doesn't start until 2:00, right? Why are we going so early?"

"Hmmm," Mike hummed, pretending to consider the question before replying, "nope, it's a surprise."

"But I hate surprises," Will said flatly.

"I know," Mike replied, his smile huge as he ignored the glare he was getting. "But, you're gonna love this one. I promise. Now let's get a move on!"

Will groaned, but let Mike lead the way outside as the pair hopped on their bikes for the moderately short ride to the mall.

The Starcourt Mall was only a few months old, but it had quickly become the go to hangout place for seemingly every teen in Hawkins and the Party was no exception. They still liked their trips to The Palace as well, but the mall had everything: a movie cinema, a food

court, all kinds of clothing shops, and, most importantly, the key to Mike's plan for the afternoon.

"Alright, here we are," Mike said, stopping in front of the barber shop. Will looked confused at first, but then quickly caught on as his whole face turned red.

"Mike, I told you to just forget it!" he hissed with surprising anger. The older boy was taken aback, and almost scrapped the whole plan right there. But he couldn't...not knowing how much this was affecting Will.

"Listen, I know you said that. But I also know that it's bothering you. What kind of friend would I be if I just ignored it? Your mom will understand, Will. You're going into high school, man. If you want a new hairstyle, that should be up to you."

Some of the anger faded out of Will's voice, but his blush remained. "Listen...I can't...I....Mike I barely have enough money for the movie okay!? I can't afford a hair cut here."

Mike panged with guilt as he heard the embarrassment in his friends voice. But he always knew this was a hurdle he was going to have to get over. "Look Will, I know you're going to try and reject this right away, but please just promise you'll hear me out first, okay?"

Will studied him for a moment before just nodding, his eyes drifting to the floor.

"You're going to let me pay for this hair cut," Mike began, holding up a hand to stave off Will's impending dispute. "This is why. First, it will make me feel better about being such a shitty friend these past few months. Second, it will make you happy when all is said and done. And when you're happy, I'm happy, so it's like I'm doing it for myself anyways. And thirdly, and most importantly, you deserve it. You hardly ever do anything purely just for yourself, man. You're always putting others first, sacrificing your own desires. So this one time...just this once...you're going to do something nice for yourself - and you're gonna let me help you."

At some point during the speech, Will had managed to look back up

at Mike, and his face had returned to a more normal shade, though now it was wearing an unreadable expression. A bit of a stare down commenced until Will finally broke. "Fine, Mike," he muttered and he brushed past him and into the barber shop. "But I'm definitely paying you back."

Mike just grinned and shrugged, not caring much either way, but very excited to see how the new look Will would turn out.

The new look Will turned out *great*. He, Mike, and a very patient barber had spent about ten minutes looking through a book of possible hairstyles to choose from before settling on one. The lady was very good at her craft, and twenty minutes later the boy with the bowl cut had disappeared (in a good way this time), and in his place stood a very self-conscious but also proud looking Will Byers. His hair was now cut short on the sides and the back, but had a little bit of length left on top which was expertly styled and swooped over to the left. You could actually even see his ears and forehead now!

A small smile played on Mike's face as he paid the woman, ignoring the questioning look he got because he was the one paying for Will's haircut. The younger boy was finally able to rip himself away from the mirror once Mike mentioned they had time for lunch before the movie started. The pair headed to the food court, but Mike couldn't help but notice Will staring at his reflection in the plate glass window of every shop they passed. Finally, at the fourth one, he couldn't help himself anymore.

"See something you like, Byers?" he said, a smug grin on his face.

The younger boy's face quickly grew red as he walked on, mumbling some excuse. But Mike wasn't going to let it go *quite* that easily. Hooking his friend's arm with his own, he stopped them both at the next store, and joined Will in staring at his new look reflection. "See? I told you didn't I? Handsome." Mike insisted, jostling the other boy playfully with his elbow.

Will just stood there for a minute, really looking at his own image before shaking himself free of Mike's grip. "Perhaps," he said with a

shrug, trying his hardest to be nonchalant as he walked away. But Mike knew Will...and this was the happiest and most confident version he had seen in quite some time.

The movie was freaking insane! Like, Mike had his hopes up high, but it even surpassed his lofty goals. It had everything! Action, comedy, romance, and, most importantly, sci-fi! And it wasn't just the movie content that was great - Mike really felt like he had almost entirely repaired his friendship with Will back to its former status. Crazy considering that he didn't even know it *needed* repairing until yesterday.

Mike had gotten an extra-large bucket of popcorn for the pair to share, so they had raised the armrest between their seats and sat the bucket between them, so it would be easily accessible for both. But when the popcorn had been devoured halfway through the movie, and the bucket got discarded off to the side, they didn't bother to return the armrest back down. Instead, Mike scooted over until their shoulders were pressed together, just like so many nights spent in the Wheeler basement, or on the couch at Will's during movie night.

Will glanced over with a questioning look, but Mike just gave him a soft smile and nudged him with a shoulder. The smaller boy held back a giggle before turning slightly, letting his back rest up against Mike's arm, melting comfortably into him. They spent the remainder of the movie like that, neither one of them shy or flustered about being that close. After all, they had done this plenty of times before. They were best friends after all.

The pair left the theater positively brimming with excitement. Will watched wide-eyed as Mike jumped up on a bench in the middle of the walkway.

"Roads!? Where we're going, we don't need roads!" he stated enthusiastically, quoting the film's last line. Will tried to suppress his laughter as he whisper yelled at him to get down.

"Mike...Mike! People are *staring*!" Will pleaded through giggles, tugging on the sleeve of Mike's jacket. The older boy finally relented

as he hopped down to rejoin his friend.

"Bah! They're just jealous of my acting ability," he insisted. Will just rolled his eyes in response, trying to keep a straight face. But Mike caught the smallest of smiles playing on his lips.

They decided to get ice cream before heading back home, hoping that Steve was working at his new job. He always gave the Party discounts. The pair were in luck as they saw their friend's familiar face behind the counter as they entered.

"Well, well, what are you doing here, you little shi-"

Steve was cut off by an extremely aggressive throat clear from his manager who was standing a little ways away.

"Uh, I mean, ahoy there lads. Welcome to Scoops Ahoy, where the only thing lower than the tide is our prices," he revised, with all the enthusiasm he could muster - which was hardly any. It was apparently good enough for his manager however, as the man gave a satisfied grunt before disappearing into the back office.

"I swear to god, that man takes this shit way too seriously," Steve complained. "He's lucky I need this job. Anyways, where's the rest of your crew at?"

Mike winced a bit, as he had mostly managed to avoid thinking about El today. However Will stepped right in, not letting Mike dwell on it. "Just us today Steve," he said quickly.

"I see," the older teen said thoughtfully. "Well, since it's only the two of you...ice cream on the house!"

"Are you sure?" Mike asked, quirking an eyebrow.

"Yeah, fuck it. Hate this place anyways," Steve chuckled. "What'll it be?"

Mike nudged Will, telling him to go ahead first. "Uh...rainbow sherbet please," he smiled.

"Vanilla for me," Mike requested. Steve gave both a thumbs up as he

hurried off to fill the order.

"Really Mike? Vanilla?" Will teased. "So plain."

"What, it's good!" Mike said defensively. "It's a solid flavor that almost everyone likes Will."

"Hmmm, well...maybe it's good to be daring sometimes, Wheeler. Break away from what everyone else is doing and try something new." Will winked at him to show that he was just playing around, but Mike still felt his cheeks tinge slightly.

"Well Byers, one day I might surprise you and do just that," Mike shot back. Before the banter could go further, Steve brought their bowls back over. The two took them with thanks, and went off to a corner booth to sit down and eat. Once again the movie was the topic of discussion, as neither one of them could get over how good it was.

Mike just sat there and listened with a smile as Will talked animatedly about the possibility of time travel and flying cars. The new haircut really did suit him, but the more he looked, the more he couldn't believe that Will ever thought he was actually ugly in the first place. His nice symmetrical features. The gentle slope of his nose. His huge, expressive eyes that could never quite decide whether they wanted to be green or hazel.

And then there was that smile. That fucking Will Byers smile that absolutely lit up any room that had the good fortune of seeing it. Yeah, Will was definitely handsome. Hell, he was more than handsome, he was cute.

Ummm...what? He thought Will was *cute*?

Wait.....what?

....*WHAT!?*

Author's Note:

I know that cut off kind of abruptly, but the point wasn't really to get into actual romantic Byler. It was to explore how Mike could find himself arriving at

his feelings for Will. Plus byler hanging out together in the new Starcourt Mall, actual date or not, was too cute to pass up.

Now, there is plenty of canon evidence that Will is gay AND has a crush on Mike. But the evidence is slightly less compelling going the other direction. I'm hoping season 3 will fix that. Let me know what you think in the comments!